1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

Olusi	*Olusina*
RELIGIOUS	
Regular village worship including agricultural festivals; village headman is also priest.	Family observances including occasional propitiations in case of illness, death, or other misfortunes; for desired economic advantages; mortuary rites. Family head is also priest.

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Classificatory System of Relationship. The relationships of the wider kinship groups are quite largely extensions of those of the household, but the Ovimbundu, in common with all people who have a classificatory system, extend these relationships not only further but in quite different ways than do those who have the European (Roman) system. One who would understand the Ovimbundu must understand the Umbundu family from the inside—not as from motives of mere intellectual curiosity but as an Ocimbundu understands it. In order to demonstrate this family structure it will be necessary to present tables and diagrams. Hambly did a very creditable piece of work toward demonstrating the structure of the Umbundu family.[1] I doubt that anyone staying among them an equally short period of time, not knowing their language, could have done better in this respect unless he had come to the task with very exceptional preparation. It is only just to state this and I feel that it is necessary because so far as I am aware, in the five years since it was published, the book has received no adequate appraisal or review.[2] It must be said, however, that Hambly made some noticeable errors in his use of kinship terms owing to the fact that he did not learn the Umbundu language, and that he evidently failed to understand certain points with regard to the social structure.

For greater clarity and precision I am presenting in separate tables the terms which refer to blood relationship and those which refer to relationship by marriage.

[1] W. D. Hambly, op. cit., pp. 189–99.

[2] This book was reviewed in *Africa*, 1935, pp. 391–3, but the reviewer had no first-hand knowledge of the people or their language, which was perhaps his reason for taking up three-fourths of the space at his disposal with questions of orthography. E. W. Smith has taken note of the book (*Africa: What Do We Know of It?*, p. 71), but only to say that it 'is chiefly useful for its description of the material culture'.

The total number of households is 44, or 49 (including those of the four section heads. It should be noted that there is a discrepancy in Child's figures (apart from an obvious misprint):(1) in another context he writes that section B contains only 12 houses (not even households), while from this table it would appear that section B has 15 household heads, including that of the section head; and section C is said to have 6 households, while only 4 (again counting the section head) are accounted for in this table.

Childs states(2) that the incidence of patrilocal marriage in Ngundo is fairly typical of Lubundo country, but unfortunately gives little information regarding the relationship of the various spouses to each other or concerning the location of the villages from which they came. Matrilocal marriage is recognised as a possibility: of the three relatives by marriage listed above, one was a husband of a daughter of the headman, another the widow of a younger brother of the headman, who should have been inherited by a younger brother (?) or a mother's brother of the deceased, or, failing that, could have returned to her father's village. Of those listed above as sisters' children, two were widows who had come to live in the village with their mother's brothers.(3)

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

The village headman(4)

The village headman *(sekolo yimbo)* is also the head of the clans which form the nucleus of the village group, and is related agnatically to most of the householders. He also may speak of the village as *tuhe liange* (my village); the heads of sections, who are also called *sekolo*(5) may speak possessively only of their own sections *(ocitiwile cange)*, and other villagers speak only of "our village" *(tuhe lieto)*.(6) The headman functions as both priest and legal head of the village. As priest he has in his compound the *etumbo* (spirit hut), in which the insignia of office are kept, and in which he prays to the ancestral spirits. Upon occasion he may sleep there, usually offering a prayer to the spirits when he wakes during the night. The *etumbo* may also be used as a lodging place for respected guests, or as a store-house for possessions not used every day. Childs states that he officiates at regular village worship, including agricultural festivals; Hambly adds that he may lead the people in offering sacrifices when epidemics of sickness break out in the village. It has been noted above(7) that it is the function of the clans head to lead such rituals when illness occurs within the clans. In general the village head is responsible for matters - particularly agriculture and public health - which affect the whole village; individuals, both for protection and for help and other

(1) Childs, op.cit., p.28, line 27, where "seventy-four" should read "forty-four".
(2) On the basis of the 201 genealogies and 74 marriage-schedules which he collected. He does not, unfortunately, give examples or show how the comparison was made.
(3) Based on Childs, op.cit., pp.27-31.
(4) This section is based on Childs, op.cit., pp.36-7.
(5) It has been noted above that *sekolo* is used for all men (and some women) of the grandfather's generation.
(6) op.cit., p.36. (7) p.28.

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advancement, will go to the head of their clans to ask for his intercession with the spirits.[1]

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As legal head of the village, the sekulu yimbo presides over both the more serious cases, which are held before the whole village on the dance-floor, and the simpler ones, which require the attendance only of those concerned, together with their respective elders, and may be taken up either in the onjango or in the headman's own courtyard. Hambly seems to suggest that all the section-heads act with the village headman as a kind of council, but does not give details. He states also that the olosekulu (sing. sekulu) of the village formerly had charge of trials for murder, theft, adultery, and arguments over land,[2] and points out that they were more active in the legal system than the chiefs.[3] This is even more true today, when the village court of justice continues to function in spite of political and administrative changes, although the offices of chiefs and to some extent of sub-chiefs have largely decayed.

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Other functions of the village headman include: the distribution of land to the various families when new village sites are opened;[4] the direction of the communal fire-hunts;[5] and, today, the collecting of taxes from the villagers and the direction and organisation of labour to work on the roads.[6] But however numerous the headman's official duties, he usually finds some time to attend to his own affairs, whether he is a farmer, hunter, or trader.[7]

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Succession to headmanship is usually from father to son or from elder to younger brother, "with only as much recognition of primogeniture as belongs to the general ... hierarchy of age."[8] Succession is, however, affected by the "democratic" tendencies in succession to chieftainship.[9]

The Chief (sowa or ova)[10]

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The Ovimbundu are grouped in 22 chiefdoms, of which half were in the past generally tributary to the more powerful chiefs.[11] At the same time each chiefdom had its separate government and could be considered as a unit in itself. Effective European occupation and direct rule have atrophied the chiefly office among the Ovimbundu, until today chiefs survive as little more than "living museum pieces".[12] Childs[13] enumerates the functions of the chiefly office as follows:

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(a) *Religious.* The chief's ancestral spirits were the principal chiefdom deities, and the king was high-priest as well as the visible "vice-regent and incarnation" of the spirits.

(1) Childs, personal communication.
(2) The maternal uncle is responsible for settling disputes over property which occur within the clans. (Hambly op.cit., p.200).
(3) Ibid. (4) Ibid.
(5) Cadenas, op.cit., p.121. (6) Ibid., p.121.
(7) Childs, op.cit., p.36. (8) Ibid., p.44.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Ovoso means chief or king. Sowa is the personalised form used with the name. This the Portuguese writers have corrupted into ovos or ovbo. (Childs, personal communication)
(11) See above, p.2.
(12) Childs, op.cit., p.20. (13) Ibid.

769 They intimate their wishes to their descendants only through slight illness, usually asking for honour to be paid to them by a feast, or by some descendant carrying on their profession.

Ocanda is the spirit of the much-honoured founder of the family,(1) and is always beneficent, bringing good fortune and warning his descendants of danger. Humbly and Tucker agree that *Ekisi* is the same kind of spirit as *Ocanda* (although Humbly does not give *Ocanda* this special meaning). Tucker writes that *Ekisi* is a benevolent spirit who calls the villagers together at night, and gives them advice through a medium (?), whom he enters without the latter's going into the usual trance. *Kandundu* according to Tucker is an *ekisi* who holds the leading position among the ancestral spirits owing to his seniority. Humbly describes a shrine to *Kandundu* at Bailundu; anyone who sees the contents of the shrine is supposed to become blind. He writes that *Kandundu* is thought of as "the spirit of dreaming who makes swellings on the body", but gives no further explanation. According to Tucker *Kandundu* is an especially powerful *ombele*, and ceremonies performed for him have many distinctive features.

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Hunt, the spirit of the hunt, has his own shrine and priest in the village of the (permanent?) chief. His hut is very large, since all the meat of the hunts is placed in it. In front of it dances are held, and poles are decorated with skulls and other trophies of hunting. Before the door there is a carved figure of *Samenho*, the spirit who chases the game towards the hunter. A man whose ritual name is *Kapilo*, and a woman called *Kumyo*(2) are in charge of the spirit-hut of *Hunt*, and make supplication to him for success in hunting. Hunters living elsewhere but in the ocilolo or head village do not have persons bearing these ritual names, but their dogs are often called *Hunt*, *Samenho*, *Kapilo* or *Kumyo*.

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The most dreaded spirits are the otulopukupuko, who may be spirits of still-born babies or foetuses, mental defectives, maltreated slaves, or persons, especially children, killed by sorcery. When a person has been found guilty of killing a child by sorcery or witchcraft, he is sentenced to "restore life" to it, which he does by substituting for it a child from his own family: if the deceased child is a girl, he must give an ox as well. The child is treated with great respect by his new family. If however the parents do not ask the sorcerer or witch for restitution, the child becomes an okulopukupuko, and may return to "eat" other children, at the command of the sorcerer who has killed it.

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RITUAL

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It has been noted that the village headman acts as priest for the olosi, the group of paternally-related persons who form the basis of the village group, while the head of the olosi acts as priest for his dispersed, paternally-related group.(3) There is little detailed information on the religious duties of these priests. Cushman(4) describes the village headman as making public prayers each morning to Suku. Childs however points out(5) that it is more usual for the headman to spend a

(1) i.e. of either the olosi or the olosi. (Childs, personal communication)
(2) According to Childs, (1949, p.31) *Kumyo* is a hunting goddess.
(3) See above, p.39.
(4) 1946, p.51. (5) Personal communication.